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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000507

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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PATRIOTIC FRONT FLEXES ITS MUSCLE,  
DEMONSTRATES VIEWS ON DISSENT

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Booth for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. In the wake of increased unemployment, high rates of inflation, and economic insecurity brought about in part by the global economic downturn, Patriotic Front (PF) president Michael Sata's prospects for victory in the 2011 presidential elections are brighter than ever before, particularly given PF's recent alliance with the other major opposition party, the United Party for National Development (UPND). However, Sata's approach to dissent within his own party bodes poorly for governance prospects in any potential Sata-led government. In one recent incident, a press conference held by PF Youth Leader Samson Zulu ended abruptly when PF thugs abducted Zulu and forcibly transported him to PF headquarters where senior PF parliamentarians as well as Sata abused and threatened him further for allegedly insulting Sata. Video footage confirms parts of Zulu's story, which is but one example of PF brutality against members who have spoken out against the party. Although some Zambians have grown wary of Sata's tactics, there are no indications that his popularity has waned. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On July 9, emboff met with PF Youth Leader Samson Zulu, who provided a transcript of his June 5th press conference in Lusaka, during which he "condemned in the strongest terms the violence that senior members of the PF are perpetuating against other members of the party." Zulu cited as an example the petrol bombing of the residence of Mandevu constituency vice-chairman Frank Lombe and the verbal abuse of PF parliamentarian Faustina Sinyangwe, whom PF supporters doused with beer in punishment for her participation in the National Constitutional Conference. According to separate press reports, PF ruffians also fire-bombed the home of former PF member of parliament Saviour Chishimba when he publicly spoke out against the party.

¶3. (C) Zulu also criticized the PF for failing to hold a general conference, which according to the (unadopted) PF constitution should be held once every five years. Zulu noted that the party had not held a single party conference since its inception almost nine years ago. Zulu opined that Sata fears that such an event will culminate in amendments to the PF constitution and his loss of power. According to Zulu, Sata "prefers remaining the dictator he is." Over the course of several meetings, Zulu also accused Sata of maintaining a tight control of party funds in order to consolidate his power within PF as well as misappropriating party donations for his own enrichment. Zulu speculated that Sata's undemocratic leadership of the PF party foreshadows the high-handed, autocratic era that he would introduce to Zambian government, if elected.

¶4. (C) During the course of Zulu's televised press conference, several well-dressed PF members entered the conference room and begin hitting Zulu. They then forcibly removed him from the premises and, according to Zulu, transported him to PF headquarters where they tied him to a chair and continued to beat him. During the course of this

abduction, Zulu said, several PF parliamentarians entered the room and joined the assault. Zulu told emboff that the assailants, including parliamentarians Jean Kapata and Mumbi Phiri and senior party members Paul Moonga and Geoffrey Chumbwe, also threatened to both "cut off his legs" and take his life. Zulu narrated that when Sata entered the room, the PF leader pretended to rescue Zulu from the violence. Before releasing Zulu, however, Sata berated Zulu for weakening the party, showing ingratitude to part leaders, and putting his (Zulu's) life in danger through his irresponsible behavior.

15. (C) Comment: Despite Sata's criticisms of the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy's (MMD) heavy-handed treatment of perceived opponents, he himself is not known as "King Cobra" for nothing. MMD MP and former finance minister Magande served as Sata's deputy ministry at finance when Sata was still in the MMD and described to emboff Sata's management style as autocratic, mercurial, and self-centered.

Demonstrations of PF violence against its own members and its lack of internal party democracy are poor bases on which to build any potential government in 2011. Given the recent alliance between PF and UPND and the tendency for Zambians to blame their country's economic woes on President Banda, a PF-UPND government is, for the moment, a distinct possibility. Zulu filed a police report following his abduction, and a police investigation is ongoing. In the meantime, the public at large (and even the independent media) appear unperturbed by PF tactics, and in fact seem to consider Zulu a trouble-maker who is seeking to damage Sata and sabotage the prospects for political change. It will be unfortunate if the yen for political transition comes at the cost of political and governance reform. End comment.

LUSAKA 00000507 002 OF 002

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